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Melasma vs Hyperpigmentation: What's the Difference?

If you've ever noticed dark patches or uneven skin tone on your face, you've probably wondered whether you're dealing with melasma or hyperpigmentation. While these terms are often used interchangeably, they are not the same condition. Understanding the difference is important because each requires a slightly different approach to skincare and treatment.

If you're searching for the best melasma cream in Pakistan, how to reduce hyperpigmentation, or the right skincare routine for dark spots, this guide will help you understand both conditions and choose products that support a brighter, more even-looking complexion.

What Is Hyperpigmentation?

Hyperpigmentation is a broad term used to describe any area of skin that becomes darker than the surrounding skin due to excess melanin production. Melanin is the natural pigment responsible for the color of your skin, hair, and eyes.

Hyperpigmentation can appear almost anywhere on the body and affects people of all skin types. It may develop as small spots, larger patches, or uneven discoloration.

Common types of hyperpigmentation include:

- Post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH)
- Sunspots (age spots and sun-damaged skin)
- Acne marks
- Freckles
- Melasma

This means that melasma is actually one form of hyperpigmentation, but not all hyperpigmentation is melasma.

What Is Melasma?

Melasma is a specific type of hyperpigmentation that usually appears as symmetrical brown, gray, or tan patches on the face. It commonly develops on the cheeks, forehead, nose, chin, and upper lip.

Unlike other forms of pigmentation, melasma is strongly linked to hormonal changes and sun exposure. It is more common in women, particularly during pregnancy or while using hormonal contraceptives.

Melasma is often called the "mask of pregnancy" because many women first notice it during pregnancy.

Although melasma is harmless, it can be difficult to manage without a consistent skincare routine and proper sun protection.

Melasma vs Hyperpigmentation: The Main Differences

Although both conditions involve excess melanin, there are key differences.

Melasma	Hyperpigmentation

Usually caused by hormones and sun exposure	Can be caused by acne, injuries, sun damage, inflammation, or medications
Appears in large symmetrical patches	Can appear as spots, patches, or isolated marks
Commonly affects the face	Can occur anywhere on the body
More common in women	Affects both men and women
Can be stubborn and recurrent	Often fades with proper skincare over time

Knowing which condition you have can help you choose the most suitable skincare products and daily routine.

What Causes Hyperpigmentation?

Several factors can trigger hyperpigmentation, including:

Sun Exposure

UV rays stimulate melanin production, making existing dark spots appear darker and increasing the likelihood of new pigmentation.

Acne

After pimples heal, they often leave behind dark marks known as post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation.

Skin Injuries

Cuts, burns, insect bites, and irritation may cause dark spots during the healing process.

Aging

Over time, repeated sun exposure may lead to age spots.

Certain Medications

Some medications can increase skin sensitivity and contribute to pigmentation.

What Causes Melasma?

Melasma usually develops due to a combination of factors.

Hormonal Changes

Pregnancy, hormonal therapy, and birth control pills are common triggers.

UV and Visible Light Exposure

Sun exposure is the best-established trigger for melasma — and that includes more than UV rays. Melanocytes in melasma-prone skin are sensitive to the visible "blue light" portion of sunlight too, and research has linked sun-emitted blue light to long-lasting pigmentation and melasma relapse.[^1] This is one reason broad-spectrum sunscreen (one that protects against visible light, not just UVA/UVB) is often recommended for melasma specifically.

Screen-emitted blue light (phones, laptops, TVs) is a separate question from sun exposure, and the evidence there is much weaker: clinical studies simulating short-term device exposure have found little to no worsening of melasma.[^2] If you're managing melasma, sun protection is the higher-value habit — device-screen exposure is a minor concern by comparison.

Heat

Heat exposure may also trigger melasma in some individuals.

Genetics

If someone in your family has melasma, your risk may be higher.

How Can You Tell Which One You Have?

Hyperpigmentation often appears after acne, injury, or sun exposure and usually affects isolated areas.

Melasma generally develops in larger patches that appear evenly on both sides of the face.

If your pigmentation:

- Appeared during pregnancy
- Becomes darker in summer
- Is symmetrical
- Covers your cheeks or forehead

there is a good chance it is melasma.

If you are unsure, consulting a dermatologist can help identify the exact cause.

Does Melasma Go Away?

Melasma can improve significantly with proper skincare, sun protection, and consistency.

However, because hormones and UV exposure play such a major role, it may return if skincare is discontinued or sunscreen is neglected.

Consistency is the key to managing melasma successfully.

Does Hyperpigmentation Fade?

Many forms of hyperpigmentation gradually improve over time.

Acne marks may fade within weeks or months, while deeper pigmentation may require longer.

Using brightening skincare products consistently can help support a more even-looking complexion.

Ingredients That Help Improve Pigmentation

When shopping for the best pigmentation cream or melasma skincare products, look for ingredients known to support a brighter-looking complexion.

Niacinamide

Helps improve uneven skin tone and supports the skin barrier.

Alpha Arbutin

A popular ingredient that helps reduce the appearance of dark spots.

Vitamin C

Brightens dull-looking skin while supporting overall radiance.

Kojic Acid

Commonly used in pigmentation-focused skincare routines.

Licorice Extract

Helps improve the appearance of uneven pigmentation.

These ingredients work best when combined with consistent sunscreen use.

The Importance of Sunscreen

No pigmentation routine is complete without sunscreen.

Whether you're dealing with melasma, acne marks, or sunspots, daily SPF is essential — and for melasma specifically, look for broad-spectrum protection that covers visible light, not just UVA/UVB, given melasma's sensitivity to sun-emitted blue light noted above.

Bebo & Co's Solar Bliss Sunblock SPF 60+ is formulated to help shield skin from UV rays as part of a daily pigmentation-care routine.

A Simple Skincare Routine for Melasma and Hyperpigmentation

A gentle, consistent routine often delivers the best results.

Morning Routine

1. Cleanse with a gentle, non-stripping face wash, such as Brita Glowing Face Wash
2. Apply your pigmentation treatment product
3. Finish with Solar Bliss Sunblock SPF 60+ — even indoors

Evening Routine

1. Cleanse again to remove sunscreen, makeup, and daily buildup
2. Apply Flawless Tone Pigmentation Cream to target the appearance of dark patches and uneven skin tone

Consistency every day gives your skin the best opportunity to appear brighter and healthier over time.

If you'd rather start with a complete routine, the Flawless Glow Bundle and Bright & Clear Bundle below combine these steps.

Lifestyle Tips for Managing Melasma and Hyperpigmentation

- Wear sunscreen every morning, even on cloudy days
- Reapply SPF when spending time outdoors
- Avoid picking at acne or blemishes, as this may increase pigmentation
- Wear hats or seek shade during peak sunlight hours
- Follow a consistent skincare routine rather than frequently changing products

  Patience and consistency often deliver better results than aggressive treatments

Common Myths About Melasma and Hyperpigmentation

Myth: They're the same thing.
Melasma is one specific type of hyperpigmentation, but hyperpigmentation includes many other conditions.

Myth: Sunscreen is only needed outdoors.
UV and visible light can still affect your skin through windows and during short outdoor trips.

Myth: Pigmentation disappears overnight.
Visible improvements take time and consistent skincare.

Myth: Only women get pigmentation.
Although melasma is more common in women, both men and women can develop other forms of hyperpigmentation.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is melasma the same as hyperpigmentation?
No. Melasma is a specific type of hyperpigmentation caused mainly by hormonal changes and sun exposure.

Which is harder to treat, melasma or hyperpigmentation?
Melasma is generally more persistent and may require long-term maintenance, while many forms of hyperpigmentation gradually improve with consistent skincare.

Can sunscreen help reduce melasma?
Yes — daily broad-spectrum sunscreen is one of the most effective ways to prevent melasma from darkening and to support any pigmentation-focused routine.

Can acne cause hyperpigmentation?
Yes. Acne often leaves behind dark marks known as post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation.

Can men develop melasma?
Yes. Although more common in women, men can also develop melasma.

What is the best skincare routine for melasma?
A gentle cleanser, a pigmentation-focused treatment cream, and broad-spectrum sunscreen every morning are key components of an effective routine.

Does melasma disappear permanently?
Melasma can improve significantly, but it may return if triggered again by sun exposure or hormonal changes.

Does screen time from phones and laptops make melasma worse?
The evidence so far is reassuring: short-term studies on device-emitted blue light have found little to no worsening of melasma, unlike sun-emitted blue light, which is a well-established trigger.